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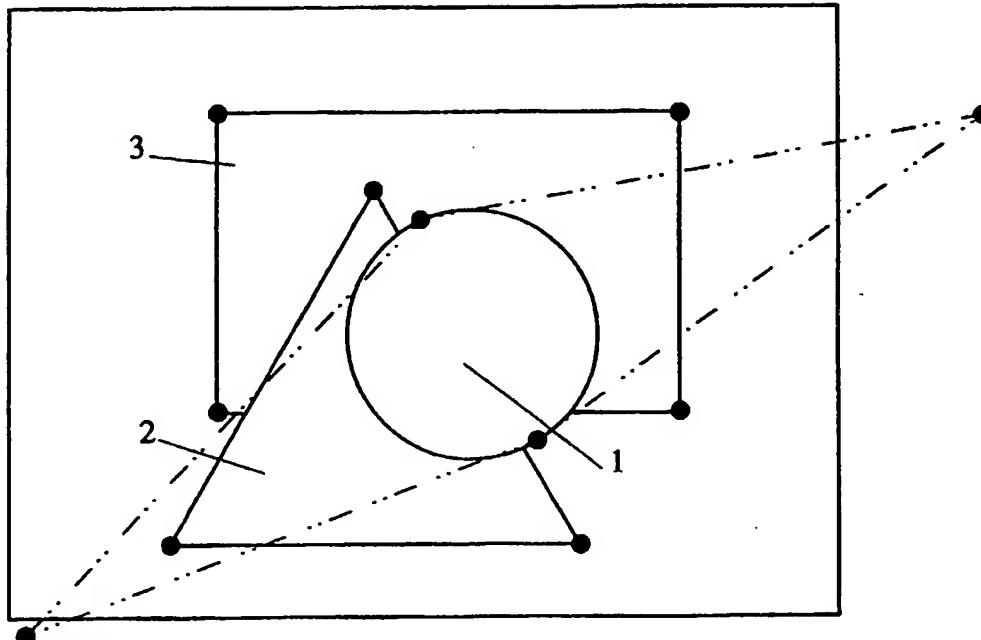
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(54) Title: DEPTH MAP COMPRESSION TECHNIQUE



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(57) Abstract: A method of compressing depth maps including the steps of: determining the boundary of at least one object within a depth map, applying a curve to the boundary of each object, and converting the continuous depth data within an area bounded by the curve into at least one ramp function.

DEPTH MAP COMPRESSION TECHNIQUE

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed towards a method of compressing depth maps, and in particular a method of representing depth maps in terms of curves, such as bezier curves, and ramp functions that is well suited for real time, or semi real time processing.

BACKGROUND ART

In converting 2D images into left and right eye images for stereoscopic viewing it is known to create depth maps to assist in the transmission and creation of the 3D image. Generally speaking, the creation of a depth map refers to a technique whereby each object in a scene is allocated a unique attribute (typically a shade of grey) depending upon the relative, or absolute, distance from the object to a reference point, for example the camera lens.

For systems that seek to create stereoscopic images from a 2D image, the creation of this depth map is in most cases, if not all, an interim step in this conversion process. The operator, or system, will analyse a 2D image, create a unique depth map, and then finalise the process by creating left and right eye images. Depending on the circumstances, this final process may take place some time after the creation of the depth map.

There presently exists a number of systems which attempt to convert 2D images into stereoscopic images. Whilst each of these systems may effectively create a depth map, the processes of obtaining those depth maps, and similarly, the process by which those depth maps are utilised differ. Further, in order to determine the depths of an object within an image and thereby a depth map, a number of techniques may be used, including the use of multiple cameras, laser range finders, radar imaging, and techniques using modulated radiation sources coupled with reflected radiation intensity detectors.

For example, in the Applicants prior application PCT/AU96/00820, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference, there was disclosed a number of techniques, including determining the distance of objects from a camera using variable focus techniques. Alternatively, the use of two cameras and an autocorrelator to determine the distance of objects from a camera was

also disclosed.

As a result of these various techniques, the depth maps may be in various formats. The more common formats including, greyscale images, colour encoded depth images, or a floating point distance matrix.

5 Whilst numerous techniques exist to convert 2D images to stereoscopic images, and in the process create depth maps, to date it has not been possible to combine these processes, such that one technique is utilised to create the depth map, and a different technique used to produce the stereoscopic image. That is, merging of the various techniques has not been possible, as existing systems are
10 not able to process a depth map produced by a different process.

The inability to combine processes can lead to the same 2D image being processed by a number of different techniques, thereby producing respective depth maps. The task of analysing a 2D image for conversion to a depth map can be complicated and in some cases time consuming, and it would be
15 preferable to avoid the need to repeat this task depending on the overall 2D to 3D conversion process selected.

OBJECTS OF THE INVENTION

It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide a method of compressing depth maps, and in particular it is an object of the present invention
20 to provide a relatively simple technique for representing depth maps in terms of curves, such as bezier curves, and ramp functions that is well suited for real time, or semi real time conversion.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

With the above objects in mind, the present invention provides in one
25 aspect a method of compressing depth maps including:

determining the boundary of at least one object within a depth map;
style="padding-left: 40px;">applying a curve to the boundary of each said at least one object;
style="padding-left: 40px;">converting the continuous depth data within an area bounded by said curve into at least one ramp function.

30 In a further aspect the present invention provides a method of compressing depth maps including the steps of:

identifying at least one object within a depth map;

determining the outline of each said at least one object; and
determining at least one ramp function to represent the depth of each said
at least one object:

In the preferred embodiment the curve used will be a bezier curve.

5 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

To provide a better understanding of the present invention, reference is made to the accompanying drawings, which illustrate a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

In the drawings:

10 Figure 1 shows a representation of a depth map depicting three objects.

Figure 2 shows how the edges of the three objects of Figure 1 may be detected.

Figure 3 shows how the outline of the three objects of Figure 2 may be represented using bezier curves.

15 DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The Applicants have in prior applications AU 10884/97, PCT/AU98/01005, and Australian Provisional PQ1197, the contents all of which are herein incorporated by reference, disclosed various techniques used in the conversion of 2D images to stereoscopic images. These techniques in part disclosed the 20 creation of depth maps and the encoding of those depth maps. However, these techniques only considered the use of depth maps created as part of the respective process. They did not deal with a depth map created by a different process.

Accordingly, if we assume that a depth map has been created either 25 singularly, or as part of a conversion process, and that that depth map has been transmitted, retained or recorded in some way, then the present invention can be adopted to convert the depth map for transmission and/or further processing so as to display stereoscopic images.

Referring now to Figure 1, there is shown by way of example a single 30 video frame of a depth map representative of a 2D image. For purposes of explanation only, assume the video image has been digitised at 800 x 600 pixels with 8 bits of depth resolution thus allowing a possible 256 discrete depth levels.

Figure 1, as shown, contains three objects, a disk identified as object 1, a triangle identified as object 2 and an oblong identified as object 3. Each of these three objects is located a certain distance from the video camera. This distance is conveniently represented in the depth map by the shade of grey it is colored 5 (shown as cross-hatching in Figure 1), normally the lighter the grey the closer the object is to the video camera. In this example object 1 is located closest to the camera and has a distance d_1 from the viewer, and objects 2 and 3 distances d_2 and d_3 respectively, with object 3 being located furthest from the camera.

In order to convert the depth map, the objects within the depth map are 10 first identified. That is, in the present example, objects 1, 2 and 3, are each identified as distinct objects. Then, once the objects have been identified, edge detection techniques can be utilised to determine the outline of each object.

Figure 1 is also illustrative of a depth map produced, for example, in real 15 time, from a range finder. In such cases, whilst humans are capable of seeing the outline of each object, the processor is unable to distinguish what each shape represents. Accordingly, the individual objects will not be known as all we have is a 2D image that represents the depth of each object in the image by a different shade of grey.

In order to determine an object edge, or segment edge, conventional edge 20 detection methods can be applied that will be familiar to those skilled in the art and include, although not limited to, Sobel, Marr-Hildreth, Canny, zero crossing in derivatives and local energy/phase congruency techniques. Using such edge detection techniques the outline of each object can be detected as is illustrated in Figure 2.

Once the outline of each object has been identified, then to aid in further 25 processing it is possible to represent each of the outlines using bezier curves. It will be understood that other curves could also be used, although beziers are preferred due to the amount of data they require to represent the outline of an object. In order to achieve this standard curve matching techniques, known to 30 those skilled in the art, can be applied to the outlines to convert them into bezier curves, as is illustrated in Figure 3. The application of a bezier curve to the outline of an object within a depth map, which can be applied manually, semi-

automatically or automatically, relies on the continuous nature of a depth map. That is, it is assumed that depth varies continuously within any segment of an object.

If there is a depth discontinuity, then an object edge or object segment 5 edge is present. That is, a further object is present, and should be identified as such.

By this process the objects within the depth map are identified and conveniently the boundaries are represented as bezier curves. It is then necessary to account for the various depths of each of the objects.

10 Once the outline of each object has been determined and represented in a convenient format, preferably bezier curves, it is necessary to represent the continuous depth value within the boundaries by one or a plurality of ramp functions. The Applicant's have found that ramp functions are a very efficient way of compressing the depth data. For example, rather than store all the points 15 along a linear depth ramp between points A and B as A1, A2, A3,B, it is possible to set the individual depths at A and B and assume a linear change of depth between the two points. The same approach can be applied for other shapes of depth – in general a mathematical expression that describes the depth function is used rather than the actual depths – thereby forming a highly efficient 20 form of compression. Such ramp functions include, but are not limited to, linear, exponential, square law and radial.

There are a number of methods to select the appropriate ramp functions which will be known to those skilled in the art. Such techniques, applied within the boundaries of each object, could include, fitting selected points of the depth 25 data to the set of ramp functions and minimising the error values. Alternatively, the ramp functions may be determined by testing for constant areas and zero crossings in the zero, first and second order derivatives of the depth data. This will reveal flat, linear and curved areas respectively.

It is desirable to determine the lowest number of ramp functions that can 30 be used to represent the continuous depth value within the object. In order to determine the lowest number of ramp functions it is possible to compare the depth function with a library of pre-existing depth functions (linear, radial etc.,)

and find a best fit. For example, a least squares fit could be used to determine the most appropriate function in the library.

Since the objects in the depth map can be represented by bezier curves and ramp functions this data may be represented, encoded and compressed 5 using the techniques described in the Applicants previous disclosures PCT/AU98/01005 and PQ1197. In this way depth maps created by various techniques can be converted and utilised to create stereoscopic images without the need to analyse the original 2D image to create a unique depth map.

In the past bezier curves have been used to create a depth map where 10 one has not already existed. However, it has not been considered to convert a depth map to a bezier curve and object depth. By representing a depth map as a series of bezier points and object depths, a very efficient way of compressing a depth map can be addressed. By very efficiently compressing the depth map it can be added into the original 2D image and transmitted along with it. Since it is 15 highly compressed it takes a little extra bandwidth and can thus be transmitted via existing video and Internet systems.

It will be appreciated that the preceding process is well suited to fully automatic implementation in either hardware, software or a combination of both. This would enable live depth maps captured from a suitable device to be 20 converted and encoded in a suitable format in real time for subsequent broadcasting or recording.

It will be appreciated that the preceding process could be undertaken completely manually. In this embodiment, an operator would manually select the outline of each object and describe the bezier curve. Similarly, the operator may 25 select a ramp function from a predetermined library of functions and/or create new ramp functions as required.

It will also be appreciated that a semi automatic process could be implemented whereby the performance of the process is monitored by an operator and assistance is given by the operator if and when the process is 30 unable to automatically determine the outline of an object or select an appropriate ramp function.

In an alternative embodiment, in order to represent the depth within an area bounded by a bezier curve, the ramp function may be replaced with other methods known to those skilled in the art, which include, but are not limited to, Meshes, Metaballs (Blobs), NURBS (Non Uniform Rational B-Splines), CSG (Constructive Solid Geometry) and TIN's (Triangulated Irregular Networks).

Modifications and variations to the conversion technique of the present invention may be apparent to one skilled in the art upon reading of this disclosure and such modifications and variations form part of the scope of the present invention.

THE CLAIMS DEFINING THE INVENTION ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. A method of compressing depth maps including:
determining the boundary of at least one object within a depth map;
applying a curve to the boundary of each said at least one object;
converting the continuous depth data within an area bounded by said curve into
at least one ramp function.
2. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein said curve is a bezier curve.
3. A method as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2, wherein if a depth discontinuity
is detected during processing, the processing is suspended to allow the additional
boundaries to be detected.
4. A method as claimed in any preceding claim further including assigning a
depth to each said at least one object.
5. A method as claimed in any preceding claim wherein said ramp function is
represented by at least one algorithm.
6. A method as claimed in claim 5 wherein said ramp function includes at
least one of linear, exponential, square law or radial.
7. A method as claimed in any claim in any preceding claim wherein said
ramp function is selected from a library of preexisting ramp functions.
8. A method as claimed in claim 7 wherein at least squares fit is used to
determine the ramp function selected from the library.
9. A method as claimed in any preceding claim further including encoding the
compressed data.

10. A method of compressing depth maps including the steps of:
 - identifying at least one object within a depth map;
 - determining the outline of each said at least one object; and
 - determining at least one ramp function to represent the depth of each said at least one object.
11. A method as claimed in claim 10 further including the step of determining at least one curve to represent said outline.
12. A method as claimed in claim 11, wherein said curve is a bezier curve.
13. A method as claimed in any one of claims 10 to 12, wherein if a depth discontinuity is detected during processing further object identification is undertaken to determine additional objects.
14. A method as claimed in any one of claims 10 to 13 further including the step of assigning a depth to each said at least one object.
15. A method as claimed in any one of claims 10 to 14 wherein said ramp function is represented by at least one algorithm.
16. A method as claimed in claim 15 wherein said ramp function includes at least one of linear, exponential, square law or radial.
17. A method as claimed in any one of claims 10 to 16 wherein said ramp function is selected from a library of preexisting ramp functions.
18. A method as claimed in claim 17 wherein a least squares fit is used to determine the ramp function selected from the library.

19. A method as claimed in any one of claims 10 to 18 further including encoding the compressed data.

20. A method as claimed in claim 9 or claim 19 wherein said encoded data is combined with the depth map or an original image from which the depth map was derived.

21. A method as claimed in any preceding claim wherein said ramp function is replaced with meshes, metaballs, NURBS, CSG, or TIN'S.

22. A method substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

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Fig 1.

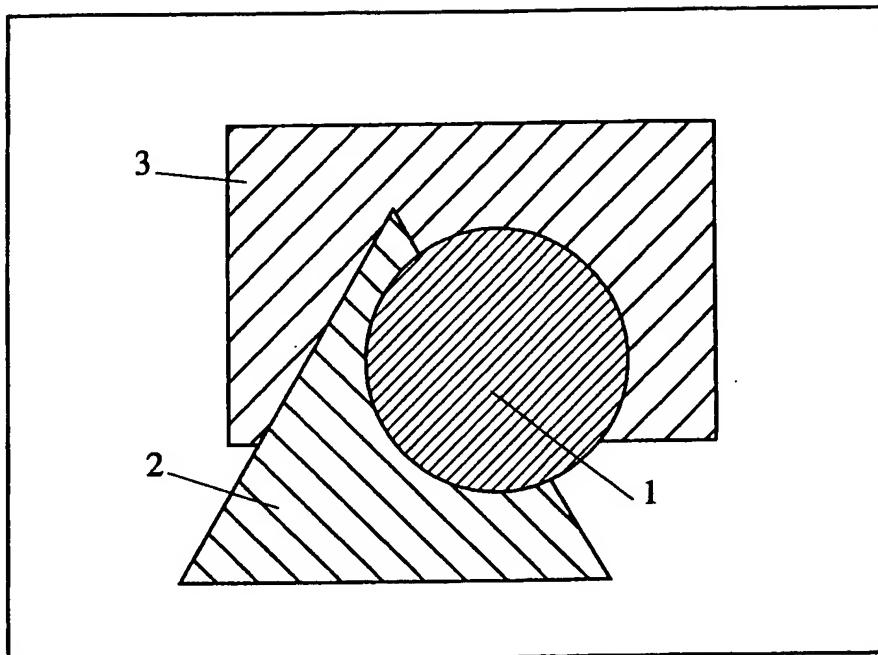
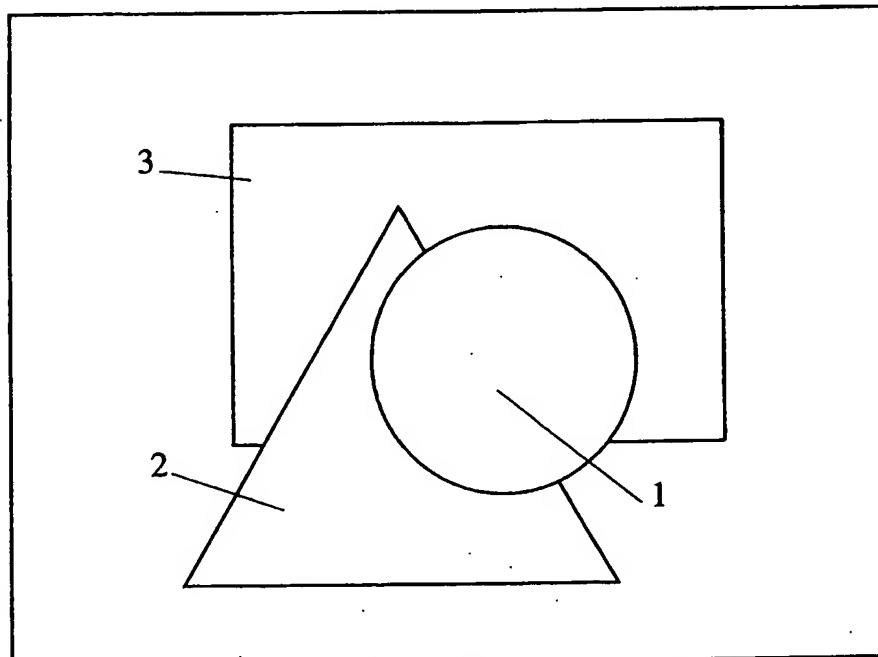
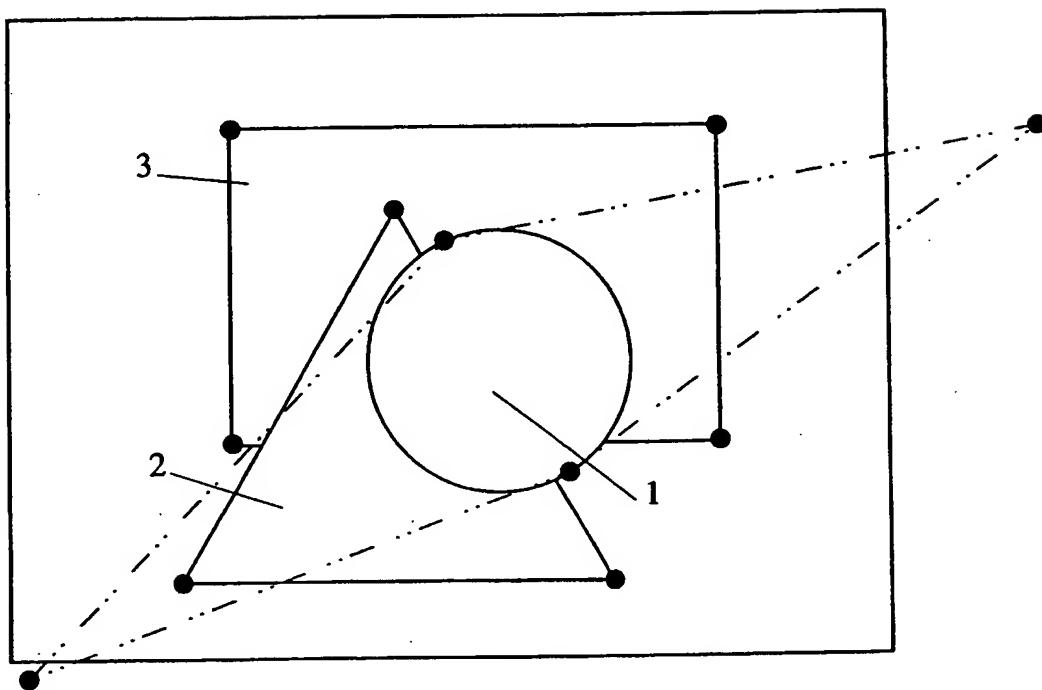


Fig 2.



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Fig 3.



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/AU00/01402

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|---|---|-----------------------|---|--|--|---|
| A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER | | | | | | |
| Int. Cl. ⁷ : G06T 7/40 | | | | | | |
| According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC | | | | | | |
| B. FIELDS SEARCHED | | | | | | |
| Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols) | | | | | | |
| GLOBAL | | | | | | |
| Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched | | | | | | |
| INTERNET | | | | | | |
| Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used) | | | | | | |
| WPAT: depth-map OR depth map | | | | | | |
| C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT | | | | | | |
| Category* | Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages | Relevant to claim No. | | | | |
| P,A | US 6,104,837-A-(Walker) 15 August 2000 Whole document | 1-22 | | | | |
| X A | US 5,960,118-A-(Briskin et al) 28 September 1999 Column 11, line 60 to column 13, line 26. " " " " " | 21 1-20,22 | | | | |
| X A | WO 99/30280-A1-(Dynamic Depth Research Pty Ltd) 17 June 1999 Whole document " " | 21 1-20,22 | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex | | | | | | |
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| "X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone | | | | | | |
| "Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art | | | | | | |
| "&" document member of the same patent family | | | | | | |
| Date of the actual completion of the international search 18 December 2000 | Date of mailing of the international search report 21 DEC 2000 | | | | | |
| Name and mailing address of the ISA/AU AUSTRALIAN PATENT OFFICE PO BOX 200, WODEN ACT 2606, AUSTRALIA E-mail address: pct@ipaaustralia.gov.au Facsimile No. (02) 6285 3929 | Authorized officer JAMES WILLIAMS Telephone No : (02) 6283 2599 | | | | | |

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT
Information on patent family members

International application No.
PCT/AU00/01402

This Annex lists the known "A" publication level patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned international search report. The Australian Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

| Patent Document Cited in Search Report | | | Patent Family Member | | |
|--|---------|----|----------------------|----|---------|
| US | 6104837 | EP | 846308 | WO | 9749066 |
| US | 5960118 | WO | 9702521 | | |
| END OF ANNEX | | | | | |